



## **State of Connecticut**

### **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL**

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### **Testimony in Support of HB 5448**

#### **An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for a Bridge and Walkway at the Wilton Train Station**

#### **Transportation Committee**

**February 4, 2013**

Good morning, Chairmen Maynard and Guerrera, Ranking Members Boucher and Scribner, and former fellow members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 5448.

At present, the Town of Wilton has all the ingredients but one for an exemplary transit-oriented development (TOD) site:

- A town center with many retail establishments including grocery and beverage stores, cleaners, restaurants, a pharmacy, gift and clothing stores, and banks
- 589,000 square feet of office space in the town center
- Eight residential complexes in and surrounding the town center, with more than 500 housing units, with another development beginning construction shortly
- Two affordable congregate housing facilities for seniors: one fully occupied and another under construction and nearing completion
- A train station on the Danbury branch of the New Haven Line that is 500 feet away from the town center
- Parking both in the town center and at the train station

The missing ingredient is a way for people to travel safely between the station and the town center without driving. This problem can be addressed by constructing a pedestrian bridge and paved walkway.

The Town of Wilton has applied for various grants over the years, and has generally requested funds totaling approximately \$500,000 for completion of the project.

While in order to succeed, many potential TOD projects require extensive planning, design, construction, and development of retail, commercial, and residential facilities, as well as complex and sometimes controversial land use decisions, this project already has all of those elements in place. Construction of the bridge and paved walkway is all that is needed to make the entire area accessible to pedestrians and cyclists.

It is important to note that the project's benefits would extend beyond the Town of Wilton to surrounding towns, with the potential to contribute significantly to regional commercial activity and economic vitality.

Wilton's neighboring towns of Redding and Weston do not have significant commercial centers, and many of their residents are frequent, even daily, visitors to Wilton's shops and restaurants. Wilton's town center is also convenient for residents of the eastern part of Ridgefield.

The signal system upgrade of the Danbury rail line, which is currently underway, will lead to more frequent rail service not only between Danbury and Norwalk, but also among the other towns on the line. Creating pedestrian access from Wilton's station to its town center will make it possible for residents of other towns to leave their cars at home for trips to Wilton, potentially alleviating congestion on Route 7 and reducing fuel emissions. In the process, it will provide access to an expanded range of retail and commercial choices for residents of the entire surrounding region.

I am conscious that this is a request for bonding at a time of severe financial constraint for the state of Connecticut, so I want to stress that I do not make it lightly. Transit oriented development has been widely acknowledged by both the administration and the General Assembly as a priority because it directly addresses so many of the current and future needs of our state's population. This is a project that meets many TOD objectives with a very modest investment at a time when resources are scarce, and it would provide a template for similar developments in other suburban or semi-rural contexts.

I respectfully urge the Committee to give the proposal full and serious consideration.